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YAEGER, ROSS

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I'm interviewing Ross Yaeger at his home at 3485 Frie Road near Forestville. We are just talking about the old days and the time he grew up and some of his experiences on the Petaluma and Santa Rosa Railway.

One of the things his uncle, Ezra, is that right? And what was his position?

R: Ezra, he was section foreman.

I: Was the P&SR Railway the only railway around here and was the main route through here?

R: Yes, but of course the Northwestern Pacific ran down the river. But as far as transportation between Forestville and Sebastopol to Santa Rosa and Petaluma it was the only way to get around.

I: Can you tell me a little bit about Harbine and the hill?

R: I can remember as a young fellow going to Analy that the railroad line just south of the Forestville Station went up a rather steep incline. In the wintertime lots of times the rails would be iced over and the boiler man would have to shoot the sand under the wheels to get traction to get up the hill. About half way up there was a little flag station called the Harbine Station. A lot of times some students would get on there at Harbine. The motorman would hope and pray that there wouldn't be anyone there going up the hill. He would have to stop and getting started again would be rather hard.

I: So Analy started at 9:00 what time would you have to get on the train? And then when did you get on after school was out?

R: We started at Forestville at 8:00 as I remember. School was out at 3:30 and we got the 4:00 train. It ran about every hour, because I remember if I missed the 4:00 I could get the 5:00.

I: What was the impact of the railroad on the lumber?

R: The lumber? Actually I don't remember if the railroad was as such part of the lumbering and logging. It was mostly the passenger service. The freight did run but it was local freight. The summer time was the shipping of apples and packed apples.

I: It was written by Honoria Tomey that in 1926 there was a large increase in the apple crop industry. Do you recall that?

R: Well yes it was as its peak during that time.

I: Were there any other products that benefited from transportation of the railroad?

R: Well there were a lot of berries in the area too. Actually it was mostly shipping of apples. It was a connecting link to get the apples from here over to Santa Rosa. It was a short haul over there to hit the main lines. They had refrigerated cars over there and it would be iced down and shipped out. There were several packinghouses all the way into Sebastopol and south of Sebastopol.



I: Jim Nagy told me that they didn't have the processing plants that they do now, but they did have packing houses.

R: They didn't have the canneries but they had the packinghouses and dryers – dehydrators.

I: Did that provide a source of jobs and income for many people?

R: Yes of course, during the harvest season.

I: So that was definitely that was a big influence on the community:

R: Yes, even the high school kids worked.

I: Did you notice any changes in Forestville or Sebastopol of the railroad other than the depot itself.

R: I don't think so, it was mainly a mode of transportation. In the early days we had just a few automobiles. A lot of people depended upon it to get to town, Santa Rosa. Housewives to do shopping.

I: How many times a week do you think a family would use the train?

R: Probably once a week. Although it was used by professional people to get to Santa Rosa. I remember a Mr. Connolley that lived near Ross Station and we would stop there. He would use it to Santa Rosa to his dentist office. It stopped at Mills Station and two men that worked at the county would commute to their jobs in Santa Rosa. So it was used by people to get to their jobs.

I: I read the peak rider ship, what they call today the toll box, in other words the number of people who rode the train regularly. In 1912 it reached 760,000 people a year. It decreased a little after that. But in the 1920's it was pretty steady.

Was there any impact on ethnic groups in western Sonoma County in those times in the railroad? Did you see many Latinos or African Americans?

R: Actually not. We had a few Japanese people that engaged in agriculture. In the dried apple plants, they were mostly run by the Japanese people. We didn't have any ethnic problems then.

I: Any personal stories about the train? Did you meet your wife, Bernice, there, anything else about the train.

R: Actually I met my wife in the packinghouse where we packed apples. We were both working there.

I can remember my school days. I remember the names of the conductor and motormen.

I: Mr. Nagy told me that there was a big hotel called the Analy Hotel in Sebastopol. It was that place or close to there and the kids would go in there for a milk shake and in the back there would be men having drinks, beers. And people wouldn't think anything of it, where kids would be restricted. A kind of more open society.



Do you have any thoughts of the railroad and it's influence? Just to remind you, it ran from 1905 to 1932 when it was bought out by the Northwestern Pacific and they stopped the actual passenger.

R: The freight line ran for quite along time after that. But it was less and less more important for passengers with the automobiles. It's usefulness for the passenger service.

I: Given the situation that we have now what would you say is more efficient and the automobiles and the freeways or the railways.

R: I think it's a matter of choice and a matter of convinces, we always had to go to the railroad station, which was in one place. And you have your car at home and that's a convenience too.

I: This is where you were born and raised, right here in this house?

R: I was born in Forestville, I lived a mile from Forestville.

I: Were you close to the train station?

R: It was a mile. I walked to the train station.

I: Did you notice any increase in military traffic during WWI 1917 – 1918, any more soldiers, etc.

R: I don't remember anything that may have contributed to the war effort. We didn't have any military installations at that time, other than if they got on the train and after arriving in San Francisco and wondered how they got to Forestville.

I: There were two steamers that had fires, do you remember hearing about those?

R: Steamer Gold, burnt in 1920. I was five years old at that time. I read about it but I don't remember anything about it. But that was one of the links of the southern P&SR and the Steamer Gold. That was how we got the freight from Petaluma to the Bay Area.

I: The service was continued in Two Rock in 1925, the first discontinuing of the system. But the service continued up until 1932. The service continued up until the 1940's.

R: The train service was a source of freight, for farmers along the line for supplies. My grandfather lived along the train line on Green Valley, he would order sacks of flour and staples like this and getting them shipped on the railroad.

I: I want to thank you.

R: It brought back some great memories. I remember when they had the two man cars, its was a boarder man and a conductor. In the last year or so, they changed over to the one-man car and it was just the motorman who became the conductor too. A mode of one-man production.

I: There are some pictures at the central library, one of the picture of a gentlemen who cleaned the cars. You always hear about the conductors and stationmasters but you don't think about the others who helped. People who drove spikes etc.

Mr. Nagy told a funny story about when he worked in the summer and they would go out and replace rails, etc. He said when the sun got hot their temper got short and they would toss their cigarettes in hat of the supervisor.



Thank you again Mr. Yaeger for your time.

END OF TAPE